# Certain Books of Travel

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FREQUENTED WAYS. By Dr. Marion Newbigin. Houghton Mifflin Company.

PEOPLE AND PLACES: A LIFE ON FIVE CONTINENTS. Anonymous. E. P. Dutton & Co.

THE CHARM OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM. By James Reid Marsh. Little, Brown & Co.

IN LOTUS LAND—JAPAN. By Herbert Ponting. E. P. Dutton & Co.

ALONE. By Norman Douglas. Robert McBride & Co.

"FREQUENTED WAYS," as a book of intensive travel and human philosophy, refutes the popular assumption that the female mind is lacking in ability to correlate facts and make orderly deductions. Dr. Newbigin is one of the few members of her sex that is entitled to write the initials of the Royal Geographical Society after her name. She is the erudite editor of "The Scottish Geographical Magazine" and in her latest book she has achieved something new in travel guides.

"Frequented Ways" not only glorifies scenery, it explains it—tells how rivers and mountains came to be, what shaped them. The Alps are not just cloud kissing peaks to Dr. Newbigin but glaciated masterpieces whose history she skillfully spells in the vocabulary of the geologist.

Against a mighty backdrop of *massifs*, forests and ice leveled plains she dramatizes civilization. How does temperature affect temperament? How are modes of life governed by the stature of trees and the direction of waterways? Why is the Matterhorn needle sharp and the glorious Schlern in the Dolomites flat as a table at its crest? Why is one valley wall steep, and another gently inclined?

The relation of physical geography to the inhabitants of Europe and their means of making a living leads to the statement that the best paying business on the French Riviera is tourism, not so much because the azure coast is fair as because its fields, crowded seaward by high mountains, are too restricted to permit extensive cultivation, and valleys are too short to accommodate important streams.

Several chapters that require study, but well repay it, are given to a discussion of winds, their vagaries and inconsistencies, to the habits of plants, the processes of soil formation, the economies of crop raising and distribution. The author interprets the face of Mother Earth as she beams or frowns, encourages or deters her children's progress. The book plumbs a hoard of knowledge about European lands and peoples. Some day we hope this distinguished woman traveler may cross the ocean to inquire about the mysterious past of American prairies, streams and ranges, and present to European readers proof that over here, no less than "over there," "the habitable earth is full of bliss."

"People and Places—A Life on Five Continents" leaves us breathless and somewhat bewildered. From London we leap by chapters from Australia to Fiji and New York; from the Malay Peninsula, Java, Christmas Island and Borneo to South America and the West Indies. A hotchpot of reminiscences recounted with racy pen by the inevitable Britisher with an official past, who, in this case, elects to remain nameless.

The author is at his best describing blood chilling encounters with ferocious jungle buffaloes, with tigers, charging elephants, hurtling baboons and man-eating black panthers. The trophy heads of Borneo make another good story. In Dyak houses they hang in bunches from the ceiling. Recipe for preparing the head of an enemy: "Fill it with hot stones till it shrinks, then hang it up; sew up the lips so it cannot reply." Of more practical use is the information about "Panama" hats, the best of which are made at Monte Criste, Ecuador. They are called Panama only because they are shipped from that port. The author before leaving the country exacted a written promise that something would be done about rectifying the misnomer in the Ecuador Congress.

"The Charm of the Middle Kingdom" for James Reid Marsh, author of a sketchy volume on China, lies in its shimmer and color, in the porcelain hue of its ladies' cheeks and in almond eyes that glow "with restrained coquetry" upon foreign strangers. It upsets all our ideas about Chinese modesty to be told that Pak-koi, evidently a lady, would indulge in a frivolous episode featuring a pink parasol, and sing love wails to a Westerner, trailing lily fingers in a pool. A teacher in a girls' school, she dared live alone in a little house conveniently near the city's gate. "Her cheeks," says Mr. Marsh, "lay under blue-black eyes like two rose petals." Then came Mignonette, a singing girl in the grounds of an imperial palace, who fed carp from a silk bag dangling on her dainty arm. The impressionable American discovered another beauty whom he was able deftly to maneuver into conversation. She, though married and Chinese, avowed she would do anything "to find love somewhere."

Intermingled with passages delicate as scenes on a paper fan about laughing girls, Chinese gardens and goldfish flecked lakes, are vigorous accounts of demoniacal processions and unholy din, and cruelties that justify all one's childish horrors of the Chinese. In the pursuit of his duties Mr. Marsh, a wide awake New Englander in the English Customs Service, journeyed from Moukden to the Tonkinese jungle,

**Among the Season's Picture Books. From "The Charm of the Middle Kingdom." (Little, Brown & Co.)**

and had numerous exciting experiences which he relates with youthful zest—and sometimes with seizing realism:

"The long jungle train sweated and steamed like an impatient horse. A crowd of natives were looking at the engine. No doubt they thought it somehow mysteriously endowed with a soul, but whether with that of a devil or of a god they were not reasonably sure. Its blackness with the circle of red round its belly suggested a devil. But, on the other hand, there were all the gold like ornaments on top; and it breathed vapor instead of fire; it must be a god.

"The engine showed its utter indifference by suddenly blowing its nostrils at the crowd. The natives scattered like monkeys at the approach of a python. Whether the iron monster was devil or god was of no immediate concern so long as their lives were endangered. A panting sound followed the blowing of the stream, and then the natives knew it was a god. For a god, as everybody knows, gets easily tired, whereas a devil is tireless.

"For a couple of hours we drew steadily into thicker vegetation. Occasionally we struck an opening and I saw a group of huts with dried banana leaf roofs nestling among the palms. A farmer was plowing a rice field that lay under water. I could just see the great bullock's head with his glowering eyes, like a moose swimming. The farmer stood in water up to his armpits, steadying the plow."

When Herbert Ponting's "In Lotus Land" appeared several years ago it seemed that literally the "last word" must have been written on Japan. But the author has made revisions and added new material, so that the work in its third edition is more comprehensive than ever. It is a really great book, bulky but not ponderous, exhaustive but never tedious.

The Japanese hail Mr. Ponting as the "discoverer of Fuji," that is, the discoverer of the picture peak in its manifold phases. No other traveler, Western or Eastern, has seen the sacred mountain from so many aspects, and pages of the volume before us are devoted to portraying with pen and lens its glorious contour. To dream of Fuji (and who could help but dream, having seen it?) is to the Japanese mind, "a certain promise of luck to come." Our favorite of the many photographs Mr. Ponting shows of Fuji is the one facing page 100—a view framed by level tree branches, with a lake and sailboat in the foreground. The shore and wooded foothills make a dusky base. And then, with utter symmetry, the slopes of Fuji-san rise at a wide and beauteous angle to the blunt cone where like an ermine shoulder cape lies the late summer snow. Under the ermine mantle slumbers a volcano which in centuries gone has reddened the countryside. The Japanese regard this loftiest eminence of their land (12,365 feet) with a mixture of adoration and terror; in their minds it is wreathed with superstition, legend and history. Occasionally zealots climb its sides in fulfillment of some vow, religious or sentimental, but few go to the crest. Mr. Ponting made the ascent twice, burdened with photographic equipment.

The author explains the status of the geisha—a class of womanhood usually misunderstood by visiting foreigners. Purely a Japanese creation, she is trained from childhood to dance and sing, she tells stories and makes an art of repartee. Just as attractive women attaches of Russian hotels are "paid for conversation," so geisha are hired to enliven what might otherwise be dull moments. They are employed to add color and gayety to tea, dinner, boating and picnic parties. Only those who misinterpret the attitude of the Japanese toward their geisha confuse them with courtesans. (*Entre nous*, ladies. —Japanese *gentlewomen* do not wear *embroidered* kimonos.)

There is little one needs to know about the physical attractions of Japan, about its home life, festivals and crafts that cannot be found in "Lotus Land." It is a library of Nippon information, and we should think its existence would, for all time, discourage other English-speaking travelers from ever trying to say with books what they think of the Flowery Kingdom.

The cameo style of the Scotch writer, Norman Douglas, is one of our current admirations. We read his "Old Calabria" and his novel "They Went," and commend them to all authors bent on improvement, as we presume all authors are.

The latest of his books is no more a book of travel than of character analysis and critical comment, smartened by amiable digressions into the fields of archaeology and science. Ostensibly it is a narrative of rambling visits (often afoot) among Italian cities and towns in wartime. The author has a preference for towns, villages, hamlets. And wherever two or three houses put their roofs together this keen-eyed wanderer discovers telling scenes and situations.

He carried on the tour a rare old book of travel written by a fellow countryman. "I mean to press it to the last drop," he says. "One seldom presses books out nowadays. We browse dispersedly, in goatish fashion, instead of nibbling down to the root." Douglas, we should say, gets out of people and places the last drop of interest and enjoyment.

The book starts at Mentone, on the Mediterranean shore, circles around by Siena, Pisa, Viarregio, Rome, Sorrento and back to Rome, and exists at Alatri—Alatri of the five gates and the prodigious walls.

The Viarregio shore was Shelley's funeral pyre. In a public square is a memorial erected by Shelley lovers. In one of the monotonous streets of this populous seaside resort the brilliant Ouida passed her final hours—poor, desolate and nearly blind. Douglas admired her greatly, and defends her talent in half a dozen ardent pages.

In Rome, on a "flaming morning," he looks down at midday into the torrid pit of Trajan's Forum. "Broken columns glitter in the sunshine; the grass is already withered to hay." Then—no more about the world famous Forum, its history and architectural beauty — but a discourse on the horde of decrepit cats that make this their wartime rendezvous . . . "safe at last from their old enemies, from dogs and carriages and boys. . . . Yonder is an old one, giving milk to the phantom of a kitten. Her own kitten? Who cares? There she lies, flat, like a playing card."

A surprising book by a traveler who knows how to draw incisive pictures in highly individualized English.